

2.2.3.4 North Central Forest Ecological Landscape

General Description

The North Central Forest Ecological Landscape occupies much of the northern third of Wisconsin (Figure 2-12). Its landforms are characterized by end and ground moraines with some pitted outwash and bedrock controlled areas. Kettle depressions and steep ridges are found in the northern portion. Two prominent areas in this Ecological Landscape are the Penokee-Gogebic Iron Range in the north extending into Michigan, and Timm's Hill, the highest point in Wisconsin (1,951 feet) in the south.



Figure 2-12. North Central Forest Ecological Landscape.

Soils consist of sandy loam, sand, and silts. The vegetation is mainly forest, with many wetlands and some agriculture, though the growing season is not as favorable as it is in southern Wisconsin. Lake Superior greatly influences the northern portion of the Ecological Landscape especially during the winter season, producing greater snowfall than in most areas in Wisconsin.

Vegetation

The historic vegetation was primarily hemlock-hardwood forest dominated by hemlock, sugar maple, and yellow birch. There were some smaller areas of white and red pine forest scattered throughout the Ecological Landscape, and individual white pines trees were a component of the hemlock-hardwood forest. Harvesting hemlock to support the tanneries was common at the turn of the century, and the species soon became a minor component of forests due to over-harvesting and lack of regeneration.

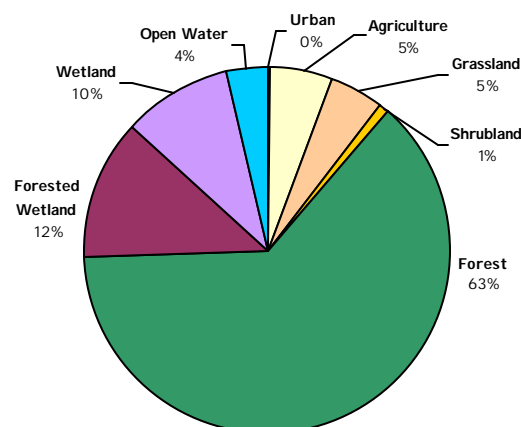


Figure 2-13. Current land cover in the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape

Currently, forests cover approximately 80% of this Ecological Landscape (Figure 2-13). The northern hardwood forest is dominant, made up of sugar maple, basswood, and red maple, and also including some scattered hemlock and white pine pockets within stands. The aspen-birch forest type group is also relatively abundant, followed by spruce-fir. A variety of wetland community types also are present, both forested and non-forested.

Hydrologic Features

Many small drainages and lakes are found throughout this Ecological Landscape. Major rivers include the Chippewa, Flambeau, Wisconsin, Jump, Wolf, Pine, Popple, and Peshtigo. Several man-made flowages exist such as the Turtle-Flambeau, Gile, Pine, and Mondeaux. Although the Ecological Landscape has one of the most favorable ratings by Wisconsin DNR for overall watershed quality, many lakes have mercury levels high enough to warrant a consumption advisory.

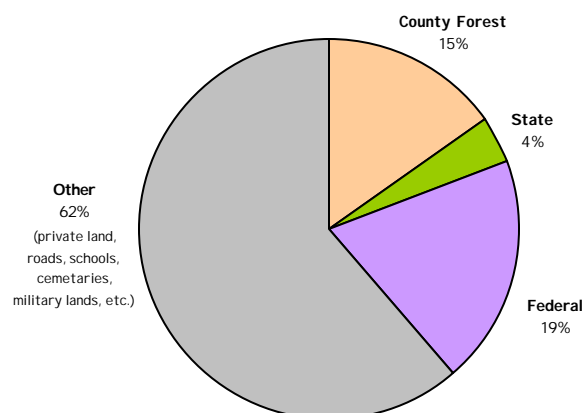


Figure 2-14. Public land ownership in the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape

Land Use

The North Central Forest Ecological Landscape contains 2.1 million acres of total land area and has the highest percentage of land area in

timberland (77%) compared to other Ecological Landscapes. A high percentage (44%) is publicly owned (Figure 2-14), mostly in federal or county management.

Socioeconomics

Socioeconomic data are summarized based on county-level approximations of the Ecological Landscape (referred to as a "region"). Economic data are available only on a political unit basis with counties as the smallest unit. The counties included in this socioeconomic region are Ashland, Bayfield, Chippewa, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, and Washburn ("North Central Forest Region").

Agriculture is not a major contributor to the economy of the North Central Forest Region. In general, this region has a fairly low per capita income and average wage, as well as the third highest unemployment rate of all the regions. It has a substantial acreage in water, especially lakes, and a large number of fishery and wildlife areas.

Compared to the other regions of the state, the population of the North Central Forest Region is growing rapidly and, on average, is much older, less racially diverse, and less educated. The population density (21 persons/mi²) is slightly less than one-fourth that of the state as a whole (96 persons/mi²). Interestingly, it had the fourth fastest-growing population from 1970-2000 with a high percentage of elderly (over 65 years old) and a high median age. This region has the lowest percentage of minorities, with the exception of Native Americans. The percentage of high school and college graduates is below average. Economically, this region is less prosperous than other regions. It has the fourth lowest per capita income and average wage and the third highest rates of unemployment and child and adult poverty. Manufacturing jobs are quite important whereas service jobs are much less important than in other regions.

Management Opportunities

- Landscape scale forest management to retain or restore the compositional, structural, and functional attributes of northern forest ecosystems.
- Restoration of older successional stages and larger forest patches.
- Maintaining larger blocks of northern hardwood forest, especially those in public ownership, is important for forest-interior species such as the black throated-blue warbler, hermit thrush, and many other neotropical migrants.
- Restore the missing or diminished conifer component of forests, especially hemlock, white pine, and white cedar.
- Monitoring and research opportunities exist in areas with significant disturbance events such as windthrow, insect and disease, and other agents.
- Continue efforts to manage for uncommon species such as loons, eagles, ospreys, and wolves, especially since these species have responded favorably to past management attention.
- Management for additional rare or otherwise sensitive species.
- Management and protection of kettle lakes, cedar swamps, and other wetlands that are especially important for their biotic components.
- Increase protection for the major rivers, to enhance water quality and maintain populations of sensitive aquatic organisms.
- Establish ecological linkages within this Ecological Landscape along major river corridors. Some of these can be extended to adjacent Ecological Landscapes.
- Protect the extensive forests of the Penokee Range, and the unusual features associated with them, such as high-gradient, soft headwater streams, and open bedrock glades.

Natural Communities

The following table (Table 2-6) lists the natural communities occurring in the North Central Forest arranged by the level of opportunity to sustain and manage the community type in this Ecological Landscape. For further explanation of natural communities and opportunities to sustain them, see Section 3.3.

Table 2-6. Natural communities occurring in the North Central Forest arranged by the level of opportunity to sustain and manage the natural community type in this Ecological Landscape.

Major Opportunity	Important Opportunity	Present
Northern Hardwood Swamp	Boreal Forest	Northern Dry Forest
Northern Mesic Forest	Northern Dry-Mesic Forest	Inland Beach
Northern Wet-Mesic Forest	Floodplain Forest	
Northern Wet Forest	Emergent Aquatic-Wild Rice	
Emergent Aquatic	Boreal Rich Fen	
Submergent Aquatic	Shrub Carr	
Alder Thicket		
Ephemeral Pond		
Northern Sedge Meadow		
Open Bog		
Bedrock Glade		
Dry Cliff		
Moist Cliff		